

Fall 2011


# The Historical Importance of Transylvania University's Medical Department (1799-1859), Focusing on the Little Known Secret Kappa Lambda Society of Hippocrates and the Origin of the American Medical Association's Principles of Medical Ethics

Charles T. Ambrose

University of Kentucky, [cambrosc@uky.edu](mailto:cambrosc@uky.edu)

**Right click to open a feedback form in a new tab to let us know how this document benefits you.**

Follow this and additional works at: [https://uknowledge.uky.edu/microbio\\_facpub](https://uknowledge.uky.edu/microbio_facpub)

 Part of the [History of Science, Technology, and Medicine Commons](#), and the [Medical Humanities Commons](#)

## Repository Citation

Ambrose, Charles T., "The Historical Importance of Transylvania University's Medical Department (1799-1859), Focusing on the Little Known Secret Kappa Lambda Society of Hippocrates and the Origin of the American Medical Association's Principles of Medical Ethics" (2011). *Microbiology, Immunology, and Molecular Genetics Faculty Publications*. 62.

[https://uknowledge.uky.edu/microbio\\_facpub/62](https://uknowledge.uky.edu/microbio_facpub/62)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Microbiology, Immunology, and Molecular Genetics at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in Microbiology, Immunology, and Molecular Genetics Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact [UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu](mailto:UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu).

---

**The Historical Importance of Transylvania University's Medical Department (1799-1859), Focusing on the Little Known Secret Kappa Lambda Society of Hippocrates and the Origin of the American Medical Association's Principles of Medical Ethics**

**Notes/Citation Information**

Published in *Transylvania Treasures*, v. 4, no. 2, p. 1-9.

© 2011 Transylvania University

The copyright holder has granted the permission for posting the article here.

## THE HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF TRANSYLVANIA UNIVERSITY'S MEDICAL DEPARTMENT (1799-1859), FOCUSING ON THE LITTLE KNOWN SECRET

# Kappa Lambda Society of Hippocrates

## AND THE ORIGIN OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION'S PRINCIPLES OF MEDICAL ETHICS

**R**ecorded histories about specific topics are often deficient in some small detail or incomplete due to space limitations. An example is the origin of the American Medical Association. Therefore, several versions of a subject need to be perused to gain an accurate interpretation. This essay relates some little known facts about an early nineteenth-century secret medical fraternity whose greater significance lies in its members who helped found the AMA.

### EARLY SECRET COLLEGE FRATERNITIES

The first student fraternity in the U.S. was Phi Beta Kappa, established at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1776. During its early years the fraternity had an oath of secrecy and a special handclasp or grip.<sup>1</sup> Some histories state that in this country it was "the sole society of its kind for 50 years."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, other secret Greek-letter fraternities followed: Kappa Alpha, Sigma Phi, and Delta Phi were established in 1825-27 at Union College, Schenectady, New York, and Alpha Delta Phi in 1832 at Hamilton College, Clinton, New York. Two notable secret societies were also formed at Yale University—Skull and Bones in 1832 and Scroll and Key in 1842.

The distinction of being the second secret college society in the U.S. after Phi Beta Kappa, however, goes to the Kappa Lambda Society of Hippocrates, established at the Transylvania University Medical Department in Lexington, Kentucky, in 1819. This fact is little appreciated today for several reasons. Foremost among them is that the Kappa Lambda Society in Lexington survived for less than a decade, although branches established in several Eastern cities continued for several more. Its members greatly influenced the early character of a later important institution, the American Medical Association. The story of the Kappa Lambda Society and AMA begins with Transylvania University and its Medical Department, founded in 1799.

By Charles T. Ambrose

### HISTORY OF TRANSYLVANIA UNIVERSITY

Transylvania is Latin for "*across the woods*" and was the name given to the lands bordered by the Ohio, Cumberland, and Kentucky rivers—the part of present day Kentucky that originally was the western extension of Virginia. In 1780, the General Assembly of Virginia deeded 8,000 acres of escheated land "in the county of Kentuckey" for "a publick school." The adjective "escheated" referred to lands previously owned by British subjects who were no longer legally allowed to own them.

Another 12,000 acres was added later to help fund "the maintenance and education of youth." The public school was named Transylvania Seminary and became the first institution of higher learning west of the Allegheny Mountains. Instruction began in 1785. In 1792, Kentucky became the 15th state, and in 1798, the seminary's name was changed to Transylvania University.<sup>3</sup>

A fund-raising campaign for the new seminary/university ("a lamp in the forest") was promoted in Eastern cities. Pledges totaling \$10,000 were obtained.<sup>3</sup> An editorial in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1905 noted that "the little school at Lexington grew with phenomenal rapidity to a position second to none in the United States."<sup>4</sup> For a decade during the 1820s, Transylvania University was "ranked among the leading institutions of higher learning" in the Union. Indeed, Thomas Jefferson favored sending students there rather than to Harvard. At Transylvania they would be imbued with "more of the flavor of the old cask," meaning a more democratic outlook, while at Harvard they would return from Cambridge as "fanatics and tories."<sup>5</sup> (See footnote 2.)



The Civil War impoverished the small colleges in the South, causing many to fold. In order to survive, Transylvania merged with the small church-funded Kentucky University in 1865. In 1878 the Kentucky legislature chartered the Agricultural and Mechanical College as a separate, public institution, and it moved from the Transylvania campus to another location in Lexington, eventually becoming the University of Kentucky. The College of the Bible also separated from Transylvania, moving to another location in Lexington in 1950 to become Lexington Theological Seminary. Transylvania University resumed its historic name in 1908 and over the next century attained its present reputation as a highly regarded, small liberal arts college. (See footnote 3.)

## TRANSYLVANIA'S MEDICAL DEPARTMENT

In 1799 the trustees of Transylvania University inaugurated a Medical Department.<sup>3</sup> This became the fifth (or seventh, see footnote 4) medical school organized in the United States but indisputably the first west of the Alleghenies. Early U.S. medical schools were commonly called "departments" or "institutes" of medicine. The first had been established by the University of Pennsylvania in 1765, followed by King's College in New York City in 1767 or 1764, Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1783, and Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, in 1797.<sup>6</sup> (The Medical Institution of Yale College was created around 1810.<sup>8</sup>) (See footnote 4.)

Students were admitted to Transylvania's Medical Department beginning in 1800 and were initially taught in preceptorships with the four or so faculty at hand. During the first decade or so, lectures were given irregularly to classes of around 20 students. The academic year was only four months long. A formal curriculum was not in place until the winter of 1819, and the first class included 39 students. By 1825 the department had 281 students, its peak number. The average enrollment in the 14 medical schools of this period was 147,<sup>8</sup> although the University of Pennsylvania had 440 medical students.<sup>9</sup>

*Transylvania's Moosnick Medical and Science Museum includes rare nineteenth-century anatomical specimens and models, pharmaceutical materials, electrotherapy machines, and didactic apparatus, among other items. A specialist from the Smithsonian Institution judged the collection to be among the finest in the nation for this time period.*

In the early 1800s, several large donations allowed Transylvania faculty to travel to Europe to purchase entire private libraries of medical works, anatomical preparations, and the newest scientific instruments. In 1828 the Transylvania medical library held over 3,000 volumes. At the time, Transylvania was the "best endowed medical school in America" and had "one of the best (libraries) in the country."<sup>10</sup> The library and museum of anatomical and scientific items are still intact and on display today in Transylvania University's Special Collections. (See footnote 5.)

Transylvania's Medical Department remained preeminent in trans-Appalachia for two decades, the 1820s and 1830s. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, steam navigation caused inland Lexington to be eclipsed economically by two nearby cities on the Ohio River—Cincinnati and Louisville. In 1837, the Louisville Medical Institute was opened with a class of 80 students. It became the University of Louisville Medical Department in 1848.<sup>10</sup> In the 1840s, enrollment at Transylvania's Medical Department began to fall. Dissatisfaction within the Transylvania medical faculty, notably with the lack of bodies for dissection, led several members to move to Louisville in the fall of 1850 and form the Kentucky School of Medicine. In 1908 the two medical schools in Louisville merged. In Lexington, Transylvania's last class of nine doctors completed their studies during the 1858-59 term.

Throughout its nearly six decade existence (1799-1859), Transylvania's Medical Department enrolled 4,358 students and graduated 1,881 physicians. The majority of trained physicians in the antebellum South and Southwest of this country were graduates of Transylvania.<sup>3</sup>



*Students purchased tickets for lectures at the Transylvania Medical Department.*





## ORIGIN OF THE SECRET KAPPA LAMBDA SOCIETY

The Kappa Lambda Society of Hippocrates was founded by **Samuel Brown** (1769-1830), the first professor of the theory and practice of medicine and also professor of chemistry at Transylvania's Medical Department. He was born in Virginia and obtained his medical training in Philadelphia and Scotland. The renowned nineteenth-century American surgeon Samuel Gross (1805-84) described Brown as "a beautiful type of man (with) a magnificent physique. . . a thorough gentleman in manner and address." To others he was eloquent, learned, benevolent, liberal, and idealistic—but a dreamer, some said.<sup>11</sup>

In 1802, while students were being taught mainly by preceptors, Brown was occupied vaccinating 500 Lexingtonians. At the time, physicians on the east coast were still debating the safety of this procedure. Only two years earlier, Benjamin Waterhouse had obtained the first cowpox vaccine in America and had immunized seven members of his Boston household.<sup>12</sup>

In 1803, Brown founded the Lexington Medical Society. It seems to have been for the benefit of the medical students, since the February minutes listed only them, some 15 in number. The October minutes concerned renting a meeting place and purchasing "candle, candlestick, and snuffers."

As noted above, a formal medical curriculum began in 1819. Part of the delay in starting regular class work stemmed from discord with local practitioners and among the small medical faculty. Doctors in the community were wary of the new medical college, fearing that it would churn out rival physicians competing for paying patients. Even within the Medical Department conflicts arose; one led to a duel in 1818 involving three professors. (See footnote 6.) Numerous professional and academic disputes were spread by pamphlets and anonymous letters to the local newspapers and disrupted the academic calm.

At the same time, a physician in Philadelphia wrote that his medical colleagues "lived in an almost constant state of warfare, quarrelling, and even worse. . . street fights."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, there was not a city or town in the whole nation "where doctors were not at each other's throats."<sup>14</sup> The cause was competition for paying patients.



*Samuel Brown, professor of chemistry and of the theory and practice of medicine at Transylvania's Medical Department, founded the Kappa Lambda Society. (Photo by Kurt Gobde)*

The vulgar deportment of his medical colleagues both in Lexington and elsewhere led Brown, the idealist and dreamer, to inoculate his Transylvania students against such unworthy conduct through his lectures, correspondence, and conversations. An acquaintance wrote that Brown "sought by all means—by precept and example—to sustain the dignity, vindicate the honor, and raise the status of the profession."<sup>11</sup>

In 1819, with 39 restless students now attending regular medical lectures, performing human dissections, and occasionally robbing graves, Brown may have thought that a student fraternity might rein in their rowdiness and instill some professional decorum. He gave the new fraternity a mysterious name, the Kappa Lambda Society of Hippocrates. Secrecy was a notable feature. He may have felt that a secret symbol and a secret password would make the fraternity more appealing to spirited youths, and that a badge and goals would help form a professional bond among them. The December 1822 minutes of the Kappa Lambda Society listed 128 members, including one from Ireland.



The significance of the Greek letters in the society's name was never disclosed publicly, but recall that Brown also taught chemistry. The Greek letter Kappa is thought by some to represent the Greek word "crystal," Κρυσταλλος. The simplest crystal is the cube, and this was the symbol adopted by the society as its emblem—indicative of purity and primitiveness. Indeed, the word "primitive" was a secret password to be used during introductory conversations to identify a member. The word was also inserted (often somewhat forced) in documents of the society, e.g., "the great primitive Author of nature" or "the triumph of primitive nature." The Greek letter Lambda had no particular significance except "to lead astray the uninitiated in their conjectures."<sup>15</sup> (See footnote 7.)

The fraternity badge was a square (like a cube, similar to the Philadelphia Chapter badge, right) on which was inscribed the words "Virtue, Science, Friendship, and Harmony."

The goals of the society were:

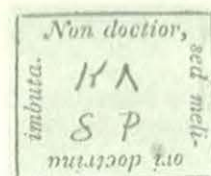
- 1) to promote medical science,
- 2) to communicate reports of interesting cases of diseases and important discoveries in the science of medicine,
- 3) to cultivate "friendly and brotherly feelings between practitioners," and
- 4) to establish branches of the Kappa Lambda Society in all states of the Union.

Nothing of lasting significance appears to have transpired in Lexington's chapter of Kappa Lambda. It remained active for less than a decade and faded from history a few years after Brown retired and left Lexington in 1825. *The Transylvania Medical Journal* (1828-1852) was edited by members of the Medical Department, but it had no connection with the society. However, the spirit of the Kappa Lambda Society survived in its branches, which flourished for a time in several East Coast cities.

### KAPPA LAMBDA SOCIETY BRANCHES AND MEDICAL ETHICS

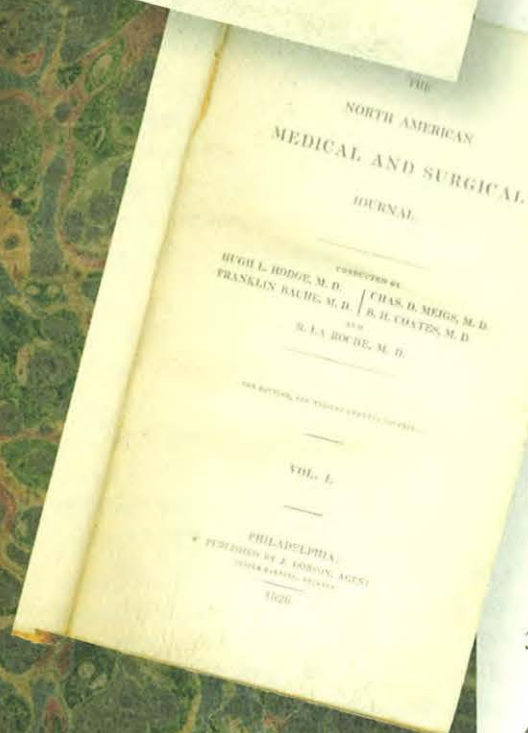
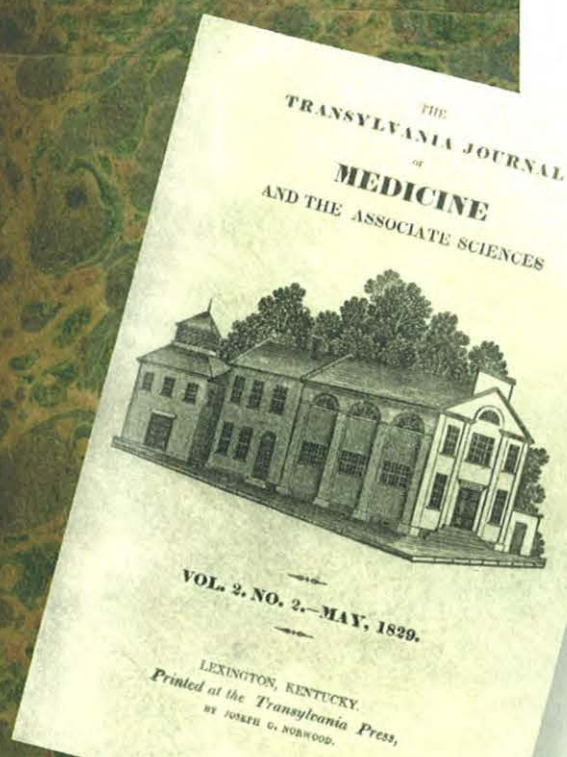
Chapters of the Kappa Lambda Society were established in Philadelphia, New York City, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and possibly elsewhere, but little or nothing about them has been preserved. In Philadelphia the chapter was called

the Kappa Lambda Society of Aesculapius, while in New York City it became the Kappa Lambda



Association of the United States. A medical society with lofty goals was desperately needed in these two cities because of the chronic dissension among doctors. In Philadelphia, Benjamin Rush had written before his death in 1813 that "nothing could exceed the malice of rival authors except the rancor of rival physicians."<sup>16</sup>

The rancor in the City of Brotherly Love apparently subsided somewhat with the advent of the Kappa Lambda Society, one of whose local founders was René de la Roche (1795-1870). He wrote of the medical profession there that "soon



*The Transylvania Medical Department published a Journal of Medicine. The North American Medical and Surgical Journal was edited by members of the Kappa Lambda Society from 1826-32, and it sought to preempt bad publicity about the secret society in Philadelphia in 1830.*



after establishment [of the Kappa Lambda Society], harmony—comparative harmony at least—was restored among its members.”

The explanation for this success may relate to an 1822 document from the Kappa Lambda Society in Philadelphia that reads, “. . . we have adopted such parts of the (book) *Medical Ethics* of the illustrious Doctor Percival, as are adapted (applicable) to the state of the profession in this country.” The parent organization in Lexington had published extracts from Thomas Percival’s *Medical Ethics; or a Code of Institutes and Precepts, Adapted to the Professional Interests of Physicians and Surgeons* in 1821 and sent them to its branches in Philadelphia and New York City.<sup>17</sup>

In the English-speaking medical world, Percival’s little book became the manual for future medical ethicists. He had compiled it in an effort to prevent the perennial disagreements among the medical staff at the Manchester Infirmary.

**Thomas Percival** (1740–1804) trained in medicine at Edinburgh and absorbed the ideas of two Scottish philosophers who taught there, John Gregory and David Hume. Gregory (1724–73) espoused “common sense medical ethics,” which seeks, among other things, to distinguish the physician’s duty from his personal interests. Hume (1711–76) stressed the importance of “cooperation in societies” to “achieve natural needs,” i.e., mutual happiness. Cooperation implies cordial relationships. These views were incorporated into the medical ethics and etiquette in Percival’s book, published in 1803. But very likely these ideas had been absorbed during the preceding decades by many other medical students at Edinburgh, including two Americans: Benjamin Rush and Samuel Brown.

**Benjamin Rush** (1745[?]-1813) received his formal medical training in Edinburgh in the 1760s. He is remembered today with some dismay for aggressively bleeding and purging patients suffering from yellow fever and other febrile illnesses. But among his more worthy medical contributions was his *Lectures on the Medical Jurisprudence of the Mind*. Published in 1810, this was the first review of medical ethics in America. Rush speculated that professional rivalry (“this peculiar professional depravity”) was due to physicians’ isolation—an isolation that could be relieved by physicians holding “frequent social and convivial meetings.”<sup>16</sup>



Benjamin Rush published the first review of medical ethics in America in 1810. Samuel Brown, founder of the Kappa Lambda Society, studied with Rush in Philadelphia and Edinburgh in 1792 and 1793. Photo: Pennsylvania Hospital Historic Collections, Philadelphia

Samuel Brown’s medical education with Rush in Philadelphia in 1792 and in Edinburgh the following year gave him a double dose of Scottish medical ethics and etiquette. Brown was responsible for a Lexington press publishing extracts from Percival’s book in 1821 and for the Kappa Lambda Society distributing copies to its branches in Philadelphia and New York City, as noted previously.

The need for some socializing force in the profession as well as a forum for settling medical disputes was milling around in the minds of various American physicians, including Daniel Drake (1785–1852), the foremost nineteenth-century physician in the Ohio Valley region. He concluded that the only solution to such conflicts was to establish a neutral body—some impartial medical association—that would arbitrate disputes and elevate the level of social intercourse among physicians.<sup>14</sup>

# MEDICAL ETHICS;

OR, A CODE OF

*Institutes and Precepts,*

ADAPTED TO THE

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

OF

PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS:

I. In Hospital Practice. IV. In Cases which may require a  
II. In Private or General Practice. Knowledge of Law.  
III. In relation to Apothecaries.

To which is added,

**An Appendix;**

CONTAINING A

DISCOURSE ON HOSPITAL DUTIES;

ALSO,

NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

BY

THOMAS PERCIVAL, M.D.

LONDON: AND A. S. LONDON: T. R. G. AND S. W. R. EDINBURGH: A. G. S.

The parent organization of the Kappa Lambda Society in Lexington published extracts from Thomas Percival’s code of medical ethics in 1821 and sent them to its branches in Philadelphia and New York City. The book became a standard for medical ethics.



So the ethical ideas of Gregory, Hume, Percival, and Rush were likely in Brown's thoughts when he established the Kappa Lambda Society in 1819. This society might have been more visible in the history of American medicine had not its branches in Philadelphia and New York City been destroyed by jealous, uninitiated physicians in these two cities. Nonetheless, the society's influence would later be expressed in another organization, the American Medical Association.

## DEMISE OF THE KAPPA LAMBDA SOCIETY

The demise of the two Kappa Lambda Society branches seems related to an alleged murder in western New York state. William Morgan was an occasional stonemason who lived in Batavia, New York. It's not known whether he was ever admitted to membership in any Masonic organization, but he acquired enough knowledge to write a book purporting to reveal the secrets of the Masonic Order. Efforts were made to prevent its publication, including arson at the shop printing the book. In September 1826, Morgan was jailed briefly for a trivial debt. When released that evening, four men were observed forcing him into a yellow carriage. Morgan was never seen alive again. Suspicious neighbors assumed that he had been abducted and drowned in Lake Ontario when a decomposed male corpse floated ashore near the mouth of the Niagara River.<sup>18</sup>

Morgan's book about the Masons was published but aroused little excitement or interest compared with the mystery of his disappearance. No other crime of the period garnered so much coverage in the

Northern newspapers. The lingering notoriety of his supposed murder stirred a latent suspicion of Freemasonry. An anti-Masonic hysteria swept over the country and soon touched other secret societies.

Phi Beta Kappa was one so affected. As noted previously, it originated as a secret society and developed chapters at several East Coast universities. In 1831 the Harvard chapter "removed the requirement for secrecy" in response to the anti-Masonic fervor. All Phi Beta Kappa chapters soon assumed the purely honorary character familiar to us today. Other Greek-letter fraternities relaxed their shields of secrecy. But at Yale in 1832, the ultra-secret society, Skull and Bones, was founded, perhaps as a contrarian response of students there to the prevailing anti-Masonic, anti-secrecy sentiment.

Meanwhile in Philadelphia, the secret nature of the local Kappa Lambda branch was revealed to the general public during a faculty fracas at Jefferson Medical College. In 1829 one of its professors, Francis Beattie, was fired. He had said unkind things about the school's founder, George McClellan,

father of the future Civil War general. McClellan sued Beattie. During the trial it was disclosed that Beattie was funded and supported by a secret medical fraternity, the city's Kappa Lambda Society of Aesculapius. A flurry of charges and counter-charges appeared in rival medical journals, one claiming that both the University of Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia Hospital were now dominated by Kappa Lambda

*Oath*  
 "I, ☐ will endeavor to accomplish the objects of this Society by employing your abilities in relieving the suffering of the — and see exalting the — profession by a life of virtue and honor — That you will by every fair and honorable means advance the interests and reputation of this Society of each of its ☐ and that you will keep faithfully all the secrets committed to you by this ☐ or by any ☐ — ☐ do furthermore ~~swear~~ that you will never encourage any to commencesments prosecute the study of the profession who from natural imbecility of intellect — from depraved moral habits, or from deficiency in literature may seem likely to degrade the — but on the contrary you will search for and encourage such youth to devote themselves to the — whose strong natural talents, virtues and amiable qualities may seem likely to become ornaments to the —, and worthy ☐ of this ☐.

*This handwritten copy of the oath taken by members of the Kappa Lambda Society is in Transylvania's Special Collections.*



members. The unfavorable publicity soon led to the demise of the Philadelphia Kappa Lambda branch.<sup>11</sup>

One tangible reminder of the Philadelphia branch resides in the few libraries still preserving the *North American Medical and Surgical Journal*, which was edited by Kappa Lambda members from 1826-32. In 1830, while defending Beattie, the journal sought to preempt bad publicity about the secret society in Philadelphia by being the first to discuss the Kappa Lambda branch there. The article added parenthetically that Kappa Lambda had "a very excellent branch in New York City."<sup>11</sup>

So it was inevitable that the northern branch would soon come under scrutiny. By then the Kappa Lambda Society membership in New York City had grown to include many physicians with the best hospital and academic appointments, the president of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and some of its trustees. In the mid-1830s the trustees "brought charges" against the College of Physicians and Surgeons faculty for some now forgotten fault. Many professors resigned in protest and then established a medical school affiliated with Rutgers College in New Jersey. Animosity became focused not only on the Kappa Lambda trustees but on other Kappa Lambda members of the local medical establishment.

An article "stigmatizing" the Kappa Lambda Society and listing 17 New York members was published in *The American Lancet* in 1830. Two so named were not members and initiated libel suits that dragged on for some years.<sup>11,15</sup> In 1839, a collection of essays appeared entitled "A History of the New York Kappa Lambda Conspiracy." Its caustic critique of the society included a poetic "epitaph," a few lines of which follow:

Here lies the Kappa Lambda wight,  
Begot by Selfishness and Night.  
It was a thing of craft and guile,  
Which bowed and smiled, and wronged the while.  
Through dark and sinuous paths, by stealth.  
It crawled to office, (and) gathered wealth.

Note that "wight" is an old Saxon word meaning a contemptible creature, often supernatural or preternatural in nature.<sup>19</sup>

The epitaph concludes:

Exposed at length, to truth's pure ray,  
It raved, writhed, withered, (and) passed away.

## THE IDEA OF AN AMERICAN MEDICAL ORGANIZATION

Contrary to the epitaph, the New York Kappa Lambda Society did not succumb in 1839 but survived until 1862. During its waning years, there appeared in New York City the first stirrings of a more durable organization, the future American Medical Association. In the late 1840s at meetings in New York City and Philadelphia, physicians began addressing the nationwide issues of medical education, certification, and licensure, along with the pressing problem of professional etiquette and ethics. The latter problem had led to the creation of the Kappa Lambda Society in 1819. But why in 1846-47 were the other issues finally being discussed at a national level?

It was primarily a matter of economics. Competition for paying patients had become fierce with the mushrooming numbers of doctors in the Union—regular physicians and non-regular healers, the latter including homeopaths, herbalists (Thompsonian doctors), eclectics, empirics, and quacks. It was estimated that in the 1840s the proportion of medical practitioners per population in the U.S. was five times greater than in France.<sup>24</sup> In 1800 there were 343 graduates from the four then-well-established U.S. medical schools. In 1840 there were approximately 30 regular medical schools, from which 6,849 new physicians came that year.<sup>10</sup> In 1850 there were 42 regular medical schools with 17,213 graduates that year. Added to these from 1820-50 were the thousands who emerged from the approximately 30 U.S. schools of homeopathy, Thomsonianism, and eclecticism.<sup>21</sup> This intense rivalry for gainful patients was reflected in the precarious incomes of most practicing physicians of the period.

This competition caused much of the hostility and many of the fights among American physicians then. Again, these were the same concerns that had led Samuel Brown to form the Kappa Lambda Society in 1819, to adopt Percival's medical ethics in 1821, and to send copies that same year to the society's branches in New York City and Philadelphia.

Other American groups besides the Kappa Lambda Society had been receptive to Percival's ideas. In 1808, the Boston Medical Association used precepts from Percival's second chapter concerning relationships among physicians in its rules entitled the "Boston Medical Police."<sup>22</sup> In 1823, the New York State Medical Society appropriated nearly the whole of Percival's code, and in 1832 the Medico-Chirurgical Society of Baltimore issued "A System of Medical Ethics" based on



Percival's book.<sup>23</sup> Boston's rules were adopted by 11 other state medical societies from 1817-42.

In May 1846, delegates from 16 of the 26 U.S. states met at New York University to draft resolutions on various matters facing American medicine. These resolutions, intended for further discussion and adoption at a later meeting in Philadelphia, concerned various topics: a national medical association, medical education and licensure, and a uniform code of medical ethics.

## FOUNDING OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

In May 1847, representatives from 40 medical societies and 28 medical schools convened in Philadelphia and approved the establishment of the American Medical Association. Delegates to the earlier meeting in New York City had included two prominent members of the New York Kappa Lambda branch, Edward Delafield and Alexander H. Stevens. From the now-defunct Philadelphia branch came John Bell and Isaac Hays, who co-authored the report on medical ethics, which was unanimously adopted. The official code of conduct adopted was patterned largely after Percival's code, preserving "to a considerable extent" his phrases but also inserting elsewhere "the words of the late Dr. Rush."<sup>24</sup>

The preamble of the AMA's constitution stated the purposes of the organization, which included "fostering friendly intercourse between those engaged in (the medical profession)."<sup>25</sup> This wording is similar to one of the original goals of the Kappa Lambda Society—that of bringing about "the cultivation of friendly and brotherly feelings between the practitioners of different districts and states."<sup>26</sup>

## INFLUENCE OF THE KAPPA LAMBDA SOCIETY ON THE AMA

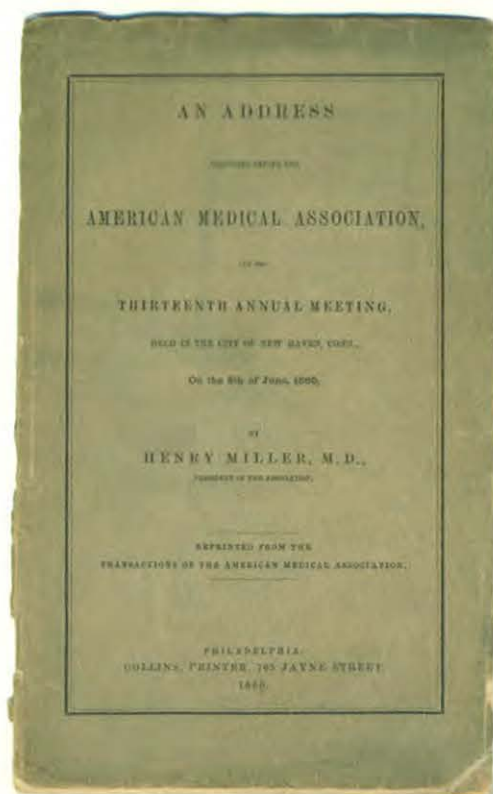
This essay suggests that the Kappa Lambda Society contributed in particular to one area of greatest concern to the AMA delegates: the principles of medical ethics. As early as 1821, Kappa Lambda Society members in Lexington had seeded Percival's code to its branches, whose Philadelphia members in turn proposed the code to the AMA convention in 1847.

An additional goal of the Kappa Lambda Society was incorporated in the AMA's preamble, as noted above. "The cultivation of friendly and brotherly feelings" was included in the minutes of an 1822 meeting of the Kappa Lambda Society in "the Medical College of Transylvania University," as recorded by Henry Miller. He was the 43rd member in the society's list for that year, a Transylvania medical graduate, and in 1859 the 13th president of the AMA. He practiced obstetrics in Kentucky and taught at the Medical Institute of Louisville University. Whether he was a delegate to the 1846-47 meetings in New York City and Philadelphia leading to founding the AMA is unknown.

In addition to the members of the Kappa Lambda Society cited above, there were eight others from Philadelphia.<sup>27</sup> Four presidents of the AMA were Kappa Lambda members: A.H. Stevens (the second, 1848), G.B. Wood (ninth, 1855), H. Miller (13th, 1859), and Samuel D. Gross (20th, 1868).

In conclusion, the early focus of the Kappa Lambda Society on medical

ethics and professional courtesy and the subsequent role of its members in founding the AMA suggest a debt owed by it to this forgotten secret medical society and the first "public school" in "*the land across the woods,*" Transylvania University. II



Henry Miller, a Transylvania medical graduate, was the 13th president of the American Medical Association. A reprint of his annual meeting address is in Transylvania's Special Collections.





## References

1. *Phi Beta Kappa, A Handbook for New Members*. New York: The United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa; 1948, pp. 5-10.
2. Greek-Letter Societies and College Fraternities. *The Encyclopedia Americana*. Vol. 13. New York: Americana Corp.; 1938, pp. 401-402.
3. Wright, J.D. Jr. *Transylvania: Tutor to the West*. Lexington, Kentucky: Transylvania University Press; 1975, pp. IX-X and 1-175.
4. Editorial. "History of the Medical Department of Transylvania University." In: *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 44: 1905, 1856-7.
5. Jefferson, T. Letter to Joseph C. Cabell, Jan. 20, 1820. In: Ford, P.L., ed. *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*. Vol. 12. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons; 1905, pp. 154-155.
6. Fishbein, M. "The Organization is Conceived." In: *A History of the American Medical Association 1847 to 1947*. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Co.; 1947, pp. 19-26.
7. Burr, H.S. "The Founding of the Medical Institution of Yale College." *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine*. 6: 1933-4, pp. 333-340.
8. Rothstein, W.G. "Medical Education 1825-1860." In: *American Medical Schools and the Practice of Medicine*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1987, p. 51.
9. Norwood, W.F. "Medical Education in the United States Before 1900." In: C.D. O'Malley, ed. *The History of Medical Education*. Berkeley: University of California Press; 1970, pp. 463-499.
10. Norwood, W.F. "The Schools of Kentucky." In: *Medical Education in the United States Before the Civil War*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; 1944, pp. 289-303.
11. Leake, C.D. "What Was Kappa Lambda?" *Annals of Medical History*. 4: 1922, pp. 196-206.
12. Hopkins, D.R. *Princes and Peasants, Smallpox in History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1983, p. 380.
13. Ellis, J.H. *Medicine in Kentucky*. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky; 1977, 96 pp.
14. Flexner, J.T. "Genius on the Ohio. Daniel Drake." In: *Doctors on Horseback*. New York: Dover Publishing, Inc.; 1937, pp. 151-214.
15. Antwerp, L.D. van. "Kappa Lambda, Elf or Ogre?" *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*. 17: pp. 327-350, 194.
16. Haakonssen, L. "Benjamin Rush: Medical Ethics for a New Republic." In: *Medicine and Morals in the Enlightenment: John Gregory, Thomas Percival and Benjamin Rush*. Atlanta: Rodopi; 1997, p. 219.
17. Ingen, P.V. "Remarks on 'Kappa Lambda, Elf or Ogre?' and a Little More Concerning the Society." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*. 45: 1945, p. 513-538.
18. Vaughn, W.P. "The Morgan Affair and Its Consequences." In: *The Anti-Masonic Party in the United States 1826-1843*. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky; 1983, pp. 1-9.
19. *Oxford University English Dictionary*. Vol. 10. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1937, p. 2426.
20. Fishbein, M. "The First Annual Session." In: *A History of the American Medical Association 1847 to 1947*. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company; 1947, pp. 41-47.
21. Cassedy, J.H. "Medicine and the Westward Movement." In: *Medicine and American Growth 1800-1860*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press; 1986, pp. 60-93.
22. Burns, C.R. "Reciprocity in the development of Anglo-American medical ethics, 1765-1865." In: *Proceedings of the XXIII International Congress of the History of Medicine, London: 1972*, pp. 813-819.
23. Kolaja, J. "Historical Development of Medical Ethics in the United States." *World Medical Journal* 1: 155-157, 1954.
24. Leake, C. "Code of Ethics of the American Medical Association." In: *Percival's Medical Ethics*. Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins; 1927, pp. 218-238.
25. Fishbein, M. "A Permanent National Association." In: *A History of the American Medical Association 1847 to 1947*. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company; 1947, pp. 30-34.
26. Miller, H. Minutes of "a meeting of the KA Society of Hippocrates. . . ." Dec. 11, 1822. Transylvania University, Lexington, Kentucky.
27. Mayo, W.P. "Kappa Lambda Society." In: *Medicine in the Athens of the West*. McClandan Publishing Co.; 1999, pp. 64-89.
28. Randall, W.S. *Thomas Jefferson, A Life*. New York: Henry Holt & Co.; 1993, 708 pp.
29. *The Encyclopedia Americana*. Vol. 18. New York: Americana Corporation; 1938, 760.
30. *Catalogue of the Transylvania University Medical Library*. Lexington, Kentucky: Transylvania University Press; 1987, 635 pp.
31. Brown, L.A. *Early Philosophical Apparatus at Transylvania College (and Relics of the Medical Department)*. Lexington, Kentucky: Transylvania University Press; 1959, 117 pp.

## Footnotes

1. An early version of this essay was published in the *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine*, Volume 78, Issue 1, 2005. Used with permission.
2. Thomas Jefferson was an ardent advocate for public education and felt that the lands in the West belonged to all the people and not to land speculators. He opposed the privately owned Transylvania Company, which had purchased lands between the Cumberland and Kentucky Rivers from the Cherokee Indians in 1775 and sold parcels to settlers.<sup>6</sup> His Land Ordinance of 1787 designated other lands beyond the Alleghenies to support education. It is likely that Jefferson promoted the Virginia legislature's grant in 1780 of escheated lands for a "public school" in "the county of Kentucky."
3. Famous early nineteenth-century alumni of Transylvania University included Stephen F. Austin, Cassius M. Clay, Jefferson Davis, and two U.S. vice presidents: Richard M. Johnson and John C. Breckinridge.
4. A scrupulous scholar might argue that Transylvania's Medical Department was not the fifth medical school founded in the U.S., but the seventh or eighth because of several others established in the late eighteenth century:<sup>6</sup>  
Philadelphia in 1765—Medical faculties existed at both the University of Pennsylvania and the College of Philadelphia. In 1791 these schools merged under the name of the former.  
New York City in 1792—A medical department was established at Queen's College (later Rutgers College). Teaching here was suspended before 1800, resumed when the school was reorganized, but ceased in 1828.  
Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1779—This short-lived medical school at William and Mary College granted only one degree, an honorary one in 1782.  
Pride here over priority rankings pales in the knowledge that North America's first medical school was founded in Mexico City nearly two centuries earlier, in 1578.<sup>29</sup>
5. The Transylvania University Special Collections and Moosnick Medical and Science Museum represent time capsules of nineteenth-century medicine and science. The Special Collections hold 1,772 theses written by medical graduates, 1,800 nineteenth-century medical books, and more than 800 such books printed before 1800.<sup>30</sup> The museum contains numerous wax models—anatomical and pathological—plus "philosophical apparatus" made in the early nineteenth century such as planetaria, Magdeburg spheres, electrostatic machines, a Lucerna microscope, and an Archimedes screw.<sup>31</sup>
6. Duels date back to antiquity (Achilles vs. Hector, David vs. Goliath) and were still common in nineteenth-century Europe and America. In this country politicians (Alexander Hamilton vs. Aaron Burr, Henry Clay vs. John Randolph, Andrew Jackson vs. numerous opponents) as well as doctors engaged in this often fatal exercise. As alluded to in the text, a local example involving three Transylvania professors occurred in 1818, when Benjamin Dudley challenged Daniel Drake to a duel. Drake declined (as later he would other such challenges in Cincinnati), but his honor at the university was defended by a colleague, William Richardson. Dudley's bullet severed Richardson's femoral artery, and the latter might have bled to death had Dudley not rushed over to the victim and, after asking his permission, applied his thumb over the groin, allowing time for a ligature to be fixed in place. "The two men were life-long friends from that moment."<sup>3</sup>
7. When this paper was presented at the April 2005 meeting of the American Osler Society, Charles G. Roland, a member and former president, made the astute suggestion that the Greek letters Kappa Lambda might also have referred to the first letters in Kentucky and Lexington, respectively.